

## Grieving and Loss

We all face losses: the death of a friend, relative or pet; a relationship ending; loss of a job, a dream, etc. These losses provoke grief, an emotion that is part of a normal, healthy, healing process. Restraining grief is harmful. Releasing it heals.

Many misunderstand grief. They think crying or showing emotional pain is a sign of weakness. They try to deny grief. But feeling the pain helps deal with loss and return to normal ways of living.

### The Grieving Process

Grieving is a process that can take weeks, months, and even years. People don't heal on a timetable. The brief time given to attend a funeral only touches the beginning stage of the process. Experts describe the stages of grief in various ways, but broadly speaking the include:

***Shock and denial:*** a numbness and disbelief that the event has occurred.

***Anger:*** at the deceased, at doctors, family members, etc.

***Guilt:*** about things not done or said

***Depression:*** about a loss that feels overwhelming and sadness that seems never-ending.

***Acceptance:*** of the situation and life's new reality.

***Growth:*** readiness to move ahead with one's life.

Some people experience the grieving process in this order. Most often, a person feels several of these emotions at the same time, perhaps in different degrees. Eventually, each phase is completed and the person moves ahead. The extent, depth, and duration of the process will also depend on how close people were to the deceased, the circumstances of the death, and their own situation.

### Grief Reactions

Grief reactions are as different as the people who experience them; there is no right way to grieve. Grief may be responsible for physical symptoms such as insomnia, appetite changes, or actual illness.

Grief affects perception- the way we see ourselves and others, the way we make decisions. We may find it difficult to think clearly and may feel a sense of

confusion. If possible, major decisions should be postponed. Small victories, such as deciding on the day's meals, will help to instill a sense of control.

Grief may prompt some people to withdraw from life or push other people to stay too busy to "feel." It is important that contact with friends and family is maintained. Contact with others who are experiencing the loss can help one to move through the grief process.

Almost every emotion can be part of the grief reaction: fear, anger, peace, despair, guilt, agitation, and a seemingly bottomless sorrow may all be a part of grieving.

### **Helping Someone Else Grieve**

If someone close is grieving, you can help.

- Show empathy. Try to understand what they are feeling. It's OK to say you care, but that you are uncertain about how to help and what to say.
- Accept. Encourage them to talk about their feelings. Listen without judging or trying to change them. Let them know they're not alone.
- Share information about grief and the tasks of mourning.
- Maintain the connection. Grieving takes a long time, and support is needed throughout the process.